

All love is equal – but not before the law

1 APRIL
10th ANNIVERSARY OF
WORLD'S FIRST LEGAL GAY
MARRIAGE

Exactly 10 years ago, the Netherlands became the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage. A group of Dutch gay rights activists had campaigned for the change in law from the mid-1980s onwards, and, following the introduction of registered partnerships in 1998, the right to marriage equality was finally won in 2001. According to the Netherlands Central Bureau of Statistics, between 2001 and 2009, 13,460 same-sex couples in the country enjoyed their equal right to marry. The landmark ruling kick-started a global trend, and same-sex marriage has since been legalized in South Africa, Argentina, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, Sweden, Norway and Iceland, plus seven US states and Mexico City.

However, this global shift towards equality represents a stark contrast to LGBTI marriage rights in the 80 countries where same-sex relationships are illegal. In 2005, Uganda amended its constitution to become the first African country to ban same-sex marriage. The extent of the persecution of Ugandan gays was recently highlighted when, on 26 January 2011, committed LGBTI rights activist David Kato was found bludgeoned to death in his house. He had received homophobic death threats and had been named by Uganda's tabloid *Rolling Stone* in an article that called for gay people to be killed.

In January 2009 a bill to ban 'same gender marriage' was approved by the Nigerian House of Representatives. At a public hearing later that year, international human rights groups testified against the bill, and it is yet to come to a final vote. According to Human Rights Watch, the law would punish people of the same sex who live together 'as husband and wife or for other purposes of same

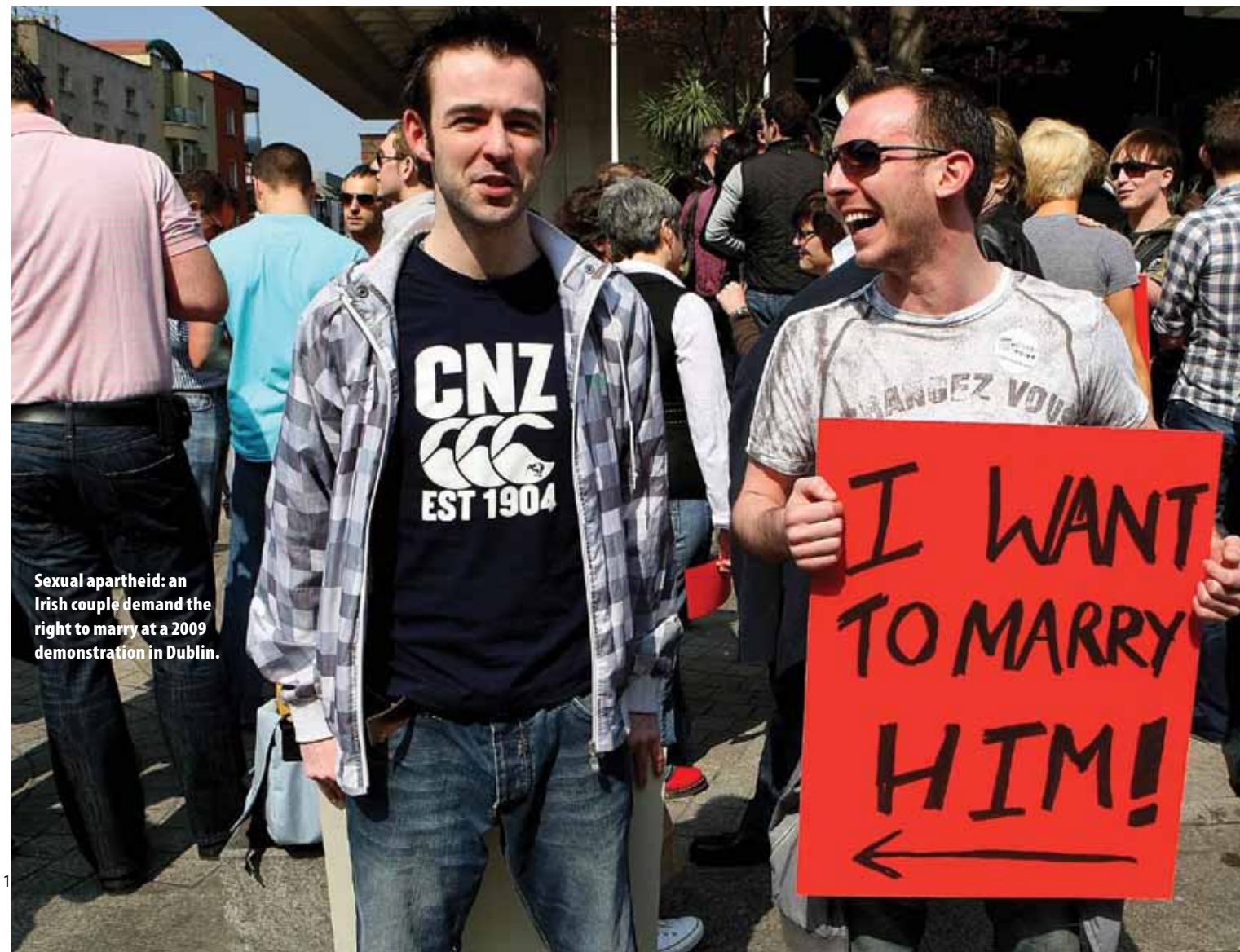
sexual relationship' with up to three years of imprisonment. Anyone who 'witnesses, abets and aids' such a relationship could be imprisoned for up to five years.

In Britain, despite the legalization of civil partnerships in 2005, gay couples are still banned from civil marriage and, simultaneously, heterosexual couples are banned from civil partnerships. The Equal Love Campaign, led by LGBTI rights activist Peter Tatchell, is mounting a legal bid to end this discrimination. In February, the campaign organized eight couples – four gay and four heterosexual – to file a joint legal application to the European Court of Human Rights. They are asking the court to declare the twin bans on

same-sex civil marriages and opposite-sex civil partnerships illegal. 'These bans are a form of sexual apartheid,' says Tatchell. 'There's one law for gay couples and another law for heterosexual partners. In a democratic society, we should all be equal before the law.'

The Equal Love Campaign has drawn inspiration for their fight from the pioneering Dutch example. 'The legalization of same-sex marriage by the Netherlands was a truly historic, trail-blazing world first,' Tatchell says. 'The symbolic significance was immense. It showed that gay marriage was possible and achievable.'

Anna Webster
For updates on the Equal Love
Campaign see equallove.org.uk



Sexual apartheid: an
Irish couple demand the
right to marry at a 2009
demonstration in Dublin.

Students of the world, unite!

1-30 APRIL
'SPRING OF RESISTANCE'
STUDENT PROTESTS

'You have much more to lose than your textbooks – the education system is the foundation for society,' says sociology and economics student Mo Schmidt. Schmidt helped launch the Spring of Resistance, a campaign which is calling upon the whole of society – not just students, teachers and parents – to act to safeguard our academic institutions, because 'the way education is shaped, who controls it and whose interests it reflects should concern everyone'.

The Spring of Resistance is the latest in a series of global actions brought together by the International Student Movement. Students in North America, Europe and Asia are staging demonstrations, sit-ins, workshops and

street theatre throughout the month to promote free, emancipatory and democratic education, peaking with a Global Day of Action on 2 May.

They are decrying the common symptoms of cutbacks to education faced by many of the 70 countries linking with the campaign: increased tuition fees, privatization of public education, the closure of departments not considered profitable, and the 'de-democratization' of educational institutions. 'Many students have dropped out as a result of not being able to pay their outstanding fees,' says Ngoako Selamolela, Deputy Secretary General of the South African Students Congress. Despite the South African government's promise of free education, 'there is still a lack of learning materials in many areas of the country'.

For Schmidt, the problem is that education is adjusted to the needs of the market rather than the needs of the people. 'By showing that people everywhere are fighting these symptoms, others will also ask themselves why that is so – and that is vital.'

Puerto Rican student Frederick Cortes, Secretary of International Affairs for the Federation of University Students for Independence, learned firsthand at the 17th World Festival of Youth and Students in South Africa

last December that global contacts 'give you hope to keep struggling and try to achieve your goals'.

Then, just last month, students in US and European cities proclaimed a World Day of Solidarity with the students of the University of Puerto Rico, where striking students have faced police brutality, sexual harassment and arrest. Of the 60,000 students enrolled at the university, up to 10,000 have not registered this semester due to a new \$800 registration fee. Students managed to delay this increase temporarily after they went on strike last year, yet had to initiate another strike this spring when the fee was reintroduced. Cortes hopes professors and workers will one day have an equal say along with students in the university. In this sense, he sees the student struggle as 'the catalyst for bigger movements, because we're basically asking for more democracy'.

Schmidt is hopeful that students will be successful if they unite to counter the symptoms of global capitalism, not only locally, but also with students abroad: 'I am convinced that, with all the communication technology and mobility, it is just a matter of time.'

Nadia Hausfather
Get involved: <http://ism-global.net>

'Pachamama, I see you so sad'

22 APRIL
INTERNATIONAL MOTHER
EARTH DAY

'Mother Earth, I see you so sad, Mother Earth, I'm starting to cry' go the lyrics of a Manu Chao song. Now more than ever, Mother Earth needs us to wake up: if we destroy her, we destroy ourselves.

A people's referendum that would tackle the root causes of climate change was supposed to be held this month. The idea came from last year's People's World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth's Rights in Cochabamba, Bolivia, but it

hasn't materialized.

The Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, adopted at that same Cochabamba summit, has been submitted to the UN by Bolivia for consideration. The Declaration challenges the self-proclaimed superiority of our species over other forms of life; it recognizes Mother Earth as a living being. She is the source of life and has 'the right to be free from contamination, pollution and toxic or radioactive waste'. Taking into account the rights of animals, forests, and rivers, the Declaration could provide a strong legal basis against environmentally damaging activities.

<http://motherearthrights.org>